MC/25/1049

Date Received:	22 May 2025
Location:	St. John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School, City Way, Rochester ME1 2FA
Proposal:	Installation of floodlights to the existing 3G sports pitch to allow for all year round use of the facility by both the school and local community groups including amendment to the Community usage agreement operating hours from 17:00 to 20:00 on Monday to Fridays, 09:00 to 20:00 on Saturdays and 10:00 to 14:00 on Sundays to 17:00 to 22:00 Monday to Friday during School Term Times and 09:00 to 22:00 Monday to Fridays in School Holidays, 09:00 to 18:00 on Saturday and Sundays.
Applicant	Governing Board - St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School Mr Owen McColgan
Agent	St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School Mr Carl Ellmer City Way Rochester ME1 2FA
Ward:	Fort Pitt
Case Officer:	Tom Stubbs
Contact Number:	01634 331700

Recommendation of Officers to the Planning Committee, to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee at a meeting to be held on 27 August 2025.

Recommendation - Approval with Conditions

1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Received 22 May 2025:

HLS5117 - Ducting Plan
HLS5117 - Setting Out
HLS9137 Rev 2 - Proposed Floodlight
HLS9137 Rev 2 - Vertical Spill

Received 5 August 2025

E01 - 15m Mast Foundation

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3 Prior to first use details of the flood lighting shown on drawing number HLS5117 Rev 2 shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Details shall include positioning, shielding, light intensity on the woodland area and neighbouring residents located within The Fort and how impact on bats has been minimalised. The floodlights shall be maintained and retained in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to limit the impact of the lighting on the Listed Buildings, the landscaping of the site, the surrounding landscape and heritage features, nearby residents and wildlife and with regard to Policies BNE1, BNE2, BNE5, BNE12, and BNE39 of the Medway Local Plan 2003

4 The 3G pitch and approved floodlights hereby permitted shall only operate between the hours of 17:00 to 22:00 Monday to Friday during School Term Times and 09:00 to 22:00 Monday to Fridays in School Holidays, 09:00 to 18:00 on Saturday and Sundays.

Reason: In the interests of protecting neighbouring amenities in accordance with Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003, and to allow the Council sufficient time to monitor the effect the later closing hours would have on nearby residents.

For the reasons for this recommendation for approval please see Planning Appraisal Section and Conclusions at the end of this report.

Proposal

This application seeks planning permission for the installation of floodlights to the existing 3G sports pitch to allow for all year round use of the facility by both the school and local community groups including amendment to the Community usage agreement operating hours.

Previously approved hours: 17:00 to 20:00 on Monday to Fridays, 09:00 to 20:00 on Saturdays and 10:00 to 14:00 on Sundays.

Proposed hours: 17:00 to 22:00 Monday to Friday during School Term times and 09:00 to 22:00 Monday to Fridays in School Holidays, 09:00 to 18:00 on Saturday and Sundays.

There are proposed to be eight 15m tall floodlights to be installed around the existing pitch utilising the existing ducting network. The application form indicates a GRP box will also need to be installed but the applicant has confirmed it is no longer required. The floodlights have the ability to be collapsed.

During the life of the application the applicants have agreed to reduce the proposed hours on Saturday and Sundays to 18:00 from the originally proposed 22:00.

Relevant Planning History

MC/22/1514	Details pursuant to conditions 18 (landscaping) and 21 (lighting) on planning permission MC/20/2839 - Construction of a 3-storey, 6FE secondary school with 900 pupils and a 285 pupil sixth form with associated accesses (including for construction traffic), parking and hard and soft landscaping and sports pitches including all-weather pitch. Decision: Conditions discharged Decided: 24 October 2022
MC/20/2839	Construction of a 3-storey, 6FE secondary school with 900 pupils and a 285 pupil sixth form with associated accesses (including for construction traffic), parking and hard and soft landscaping and sports pitches including all-weather pitch. Decision: Approved with conditions Decided: 27April 2021

Representations

The application has been advertised on site, in the press and by individual neighbour notification to the owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties. Rochester Airport, Sports England and Historic England have also been consulted.

Fifteen letters of objection from **eleven** contributors have been received raising the following planning concerns:

- Noise and light disturbance to neighbouring properties from the floodlights and proposed increase in hours.
- Hours proposed too late into evening and excessive.
- School should explore lower impact lighting and acoustic barriers.
- Original consent condition 24, ecological mitigation, included that the playing field and pitches would not be lit.
- Harm to the setting of the Fort Pitt Scheduled Monument, floodlights causing harm to the fields of fire.
- Increased traffic and parking disturbance to neighbours.
- School has been breaching the consented hours.

One letter of support has been received indicating that the development will support the local community particularly by 500 children who regularly come together to play football, which is a vital source of physical activity, teamwork and community spirit. The current lack of adequate lighting limits their ability to train and play safely during darker months.

Sports England have written to confirm they welcome the application as the installation of sports lights and amendment to community use agreement will increase the participation at the site and continue to grow healthy communities. They advise that the Kent Football Association indicates Medway has the need for 15 full sized 3G pitches to cater for the 573 teams in the local authority area. There is only 6 full sized pitches with lighting and this would reduce the shortfall from 9 to 8. No objection is raised as the application meets exemption 2 of their Playing Fields Policy and paragraph 104 of the NPPF.

Historic England have written to indicate that the site lies immediately adjacent to Fort Pitt which is a nationally important scheduled monument and also lies within the New Road conservation area. The fort was designed to be surrounded for tactical reasons by open ground and the area to the south encompassed by the school playing fields forms an important part of the forts setting as its former fields of fire. They note that harm could stem from operation such as noise, lighting, traffic movements which can affect the appreciation and understanding of the moment or other surrounding heritage assets within the original school application. Harm was minimised by not positioning car parking, flood lights or key buildings in close proximity to the fort or in key views. The proposed floodlighting would introduce modern infrastructure onto the playing field in the immediate setting of the fort with vertical poles and lighting interrupting the purposely open context of the fort which is the strategic design which would result in a harm to the forts significance disrupting appreciation of the former field of fire. Paragraph 208 of the NPPF requires applicants to avoid or minimise conflict between the conservation or a designed heritage asset. Paragraph 212 of the NPPF indicates the greater the importance of the heritage asset the greater the weight should be given. Paragraph 213 of the NPPF requires any harm should be clear and convincing justification.

Historic England assess the harm would be at the lower end of less than substantial harm. They advise that it is up to Medway LPA to consider whether the harm has been sufficiently avoided and minimalised and any residual harm justified and outweighed by the public benefit of the proposals as per paragraph 215 of the NPPF.

Development Plan

The Emerging Local Plan has been agreed by Full Council for Reg 19 publication, consultation and, following any changes required as a result of the consultation exercise, submission to the Inspectorate for examination. The policies within this version of the emerging plan have weight in the determination of planning (and associated) applications. However, due to the nature of this proposal, the stage of the emerging Local Plan, the existence of relevant adopted Policies in the Medway Local Plan (2003) and guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) it is considered that the proposal falls to be considered with regard to the adopted policies and guidance in the NPPF.

The Development Plan for the area comprises the Medway Local Plan 2003 (the Local Plan). The policies referred to within this document and used in the processing of this application have been assessed against the NPPF 2004 and are generally considered to conform. Where non-conformity exists, this is addressed in the Planning Appraisal section below.

Planning Appraisal

Background

MC/20/2839 approved the school and the all-weather pitch that is the subject of this current application. The consent controlled the opening hours of the pitch for the school and community use via condition 23 as follows:

The facilities to be used for community purposes as outlined in the Community Use Agreement (CUA) to be approved under condition 22 shall not be used outside of the following hours:

17:00 to 22:00 Monday to Friday for internal spaces
08:00 to 22:00 on Saturday and Sunday for internal spaces
17:00 to 20:00 on Monday to Friday for the external pitches
09:00 to 20:00 on Saturday for the external pitches
10:00 to 14:00 on Sunday for the external pitches

Reason: In the interests of residential amenity in accordance with Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

Principle

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The proposal does not result in a change of use of the application site and would still operate as pitches relating to both school and community use. Consequently, there is no objection in principle.

Sports England have confirmed that there is a shortage of full sized 3G pitches within Medway and the inclusion of floodlights on this pitch with later hours would include this pitch in the requirement considerations reducing the shortfall to 8 pitches within Medway.

Design and historic impact

Paragraphs 131 and 135 of the NPPF emphasise the importance of good design. Policy BNE1 of the Local Plan states that development should be satisfactory in terms of scale and mass and should respect the visual amenity of the surrounding area. Policy BNE20 indicates development should not be detrimental to the setting of Scheduled ancient monuments.

The proposed floodlights would usually be a form of development associated with a 3G pitch provision. However, due to the site being located within the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Fort Pitt more careful consideration is required with regard to the design and impact of the proposal.

The Historic England consultation response highlights the following harms. "*The proposed floodlighting would introduce modern infrastructure onto the playing field in the immediate setting of the fort with vertical poles and lighting interrupting the purposely open context of the fort which is the strategic design which would result in a harm to the forts significance disrupting appreciation of the former field of fire….. Historic England assess the harm would be lower end of less than substantial harm. Your authority should therefore consider whether the harm is sufficiently avoided and minimalised and any residual harm justified and outweighed by the public benefit of the proposals as per paragraph 215 of the NPPF.*

The applicant has indicated that the lighting design with LED lights has been carefully considered whilst also needing to meet the requirements for the pitch lights. The LED lighting has been chosen to reduce light spill to the area and the specific floodlight design has been chosen as, although tall, they are considered the least bulky in views as they taper in dimensions from base to top. Furthermore, during the life of the application the applicant has removed the need for a GRP box which would have added modern infrastructure in this area. Consequently, it is considered that the harm has been minimalised as required by paragraph 208 of the NPPF.

Historic England have assessed the harm as being at the lower end of less than substantial harm, which has been concluded whilst considering paragraph 212 of the NPPF. The proposed use would be used by both the school and the local community. The enhancement of the facility by the proposed floodlights means that there is no seasonal impact on the ability to use the pitch and the facility can increase participation levels to assist in providing healthier communities. The inclusion of floodlights would also mean this provision can be counted towards meeting the under provision of full sized 3G pitches provision within Medway as highlighted by the Kent Football Association within the Sport England consultation response. Consequently, it is considered that the public benefit would outweigh the harm in this occasion.

Consequently, the development is considered to be in accordance with Policies BNE1 and BNE20 of the Medway Local Plan 2003, paragraphs 131, 135, 208, 212, 213 and 215 of the NPPF and Policy S8, T1, DM9 and DM10 of the Draft Reg 19 Local Pan 2025.

Amenity

By virtue of the nature of the existing use and pitch there would not be any detrimental impact on neighbour amenity with regards to privacy, overlooking, sunlight or daylight from the floodlights themselves.

The floodlights have been designed to minimise light spill to surrounding properties as demonstrated by the supporting Lighting Impact Report & Overspill Readings document - most notably the properties within The Fort fronting the pitches. A condition is recommended to ensure that floodlights are maintained with the correct shields to provide the level of impact assessed.

With regard to extended hours of the pitches. The applicant has reduced the hours proposed within the life of the application. The pitch was originally proposed to be

used until 22:00 on all days of the week. However, this has subsequently been reduced to 18:00 on weekends. This does appear to reflect other 3G pitch use times within Medway such as PSA Performance Centre in Rainham and Star Meadow Sports and Social Club in Darland Avenue. An appropriate condition is recommended.

Subject to the recommended conditions, the proposal is considered acceptable with regards to impact on neighbours and the application is therefore in accordance with Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003, paragraph 135 of the NPPF and T1 of the draft Reg 19 Local Plan 2025.

Highways

The proposed extended use of hours would not result in a significant increase in traffic that would result in any highway safety issues or a severe impact on the highway network.

No objection is raised in respect of the transport and parking in line with Policy T1 of the Local Plan, paragraphs 116 and 117 of NPPF and Policies DM18 and DM19 of the draft reg 19 Local Plan 2025.

Ecology and biodiversity

With regard to biodiversity net gain, it is accepted as this relates only to floodlight provision that the proposal would be considered de minimis with regards to BNG and therefore exempt from the statutory requirements.

With regards to the impacts on ecology, condition 24 of the original consent required the site to operate in accordance with the ecological mitigation submitted. Paragraph 5.2.2 of the approved Ecological Mitigation Statement Strategy reads: *The playing fields and sports pitches will not have any floodlighting. Where lighting is required (within car parking area and around school buildings) lighting has been designed to reduce light spill onto the wooded site boundaries which have been identified as commuting and foraging routes. These dark corridors will be maintained in perpetuity to allow the continued use of the site by commuting and foraging bats.*

No ecological information has been provided in support of the application. However, the light spill drawings demonstrate the light from the floodlights is focused on the pitch and only low levels of spill would reach the adjoining wooded boundary. Accordingly, a condition is recommended to secure the final lighting and additional shielding details to minimise the light spill into this area.

Consequently, the proposals are considered in accordance with Policy BNE37 of the Local Plan, paragraph 187 of the NPPF and Policies S2 and S3 of the Draft Reg 19 Local Pan 2025.

Local Finance Considerations

There are no local finance considerations.

Conclusions and Reasons for Approval

Overall, the proposals, subject to the recommended conditions, are considered acceptable in terms of impacts on residential amenity, the highway network and ecology while the impact on heritage is outweighed by the public benefits to allow increased participation levels in sports to aid fostering healthier communities within Medway.

The application therefore accords with the provisions of the paragraphs 116, 117, 131, 135, 187, 208, 212, 213 and 215 of the NPPF, Policies BNE1, BNE2, BNE20, BNE27 and T1 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and Policies S2, S3, S8, T1, DM9 and DM10, DM18 and DM19 of the Draft Reg 19 Local Pan 2025.

The application would normally be determined under delegated powers but is being referred for Committee determination due to the number of representations received expressing views contrary to the officers recommendation.

Background Papers

The relevant background papers relating to the individual applications comprise: the applications and all supporting documentation submitted therewith; and items identified in any Relevant History and Representations section within the report.

Any information referred to is available for inspection in the Planning Offices of Medway Council at Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR and here http://publicaccess1.medway.gov.uk/online-applications/